

PS3511
.E72 F3
1904

FAR WEST POEMS

By

WILLIAM DALLAS FERREE



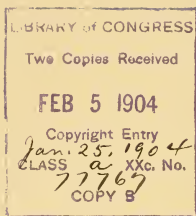
FAR WEST POEMS

By

WILLIAM DALLAS FERREE

DES MOINES, IOWA.
INLAND PRINTING COMPANY.

1904.



793511
.E72 F3
1904

Copyright, 1904, by
WILLIAM DALLAS FERRELL

DEAR READER:

This little book, descriptive of the West, past and present, is intended as a tribute to the brave men and women who endured the many hardships and privations of pioneer life.



THE FAR, FAR WEST.

Once these fields, these beauteous western plains,
Was but the habitation of strange men
Whose history vanished with them; nor remains
One treasured page to tell the white man when
He first laid claim upon this scenic land,
When first he strolled about these lovely hills,
When first the wily chieftain led his band
Of dusky warriors by these gentle rills.

A child of Nature, born where prairies sweep
In charming undulation far away,
Where roll fair rivers, beautiful and deep,
On which his light canoe was wont to play;
What must have been the agony, at last,
That filled his soul, when immigration's flow
Poured in upon his habitations fast,
And he was forced to farther westward go.

These prairies were his hunting grounds; 'twas
here

The bison thundered o'er the plains in fright;
And wandering in timidity, the deer,

At sight of some bold hunter, took its flight
Across the greyish wastes of boundless space.

And these were scenes that pleased the Indian's
eye,

And made him furious for th' exciting chase,
That closed not 'till a many a-moon went by.

He looked upon the white man as men do
Upon some evil spirit, in whose hand
Is borne a rod of terror and of woe,
To mete destruction to a helpless land.
He taught his children never to reveal
The cherished secrets of his savage life;
And so remains, firm-clasped beneath a seal,
The thrilling story of a wondrous strife.

The changing seasons sere the autumn leaf,
And blight and kill the flowers that sweetly bloom,
And Nature, lonely Nature, in her grief
Is wrapped in silence, o'er the pitying gloom.
And what availeth aught of life, alas!
To Nature's self, so desolate and lone,
With flowers and leaves heaped in one faded mass,
And all her gladness and her beauty flown.

Thus spake La-sha-ro in comparison
Of the departed braves, who, year by year,
Their little race of life have quickly run,—
Who sleep where never visitors appear.
The thousands buried by our western streams,
Or where the prairie in its beauty lies,
Like things ignoble born of troubled dreams,
Died and are lost in death's dark mysteries.

Once these fields, this beauteous western land,
Was one vast solitude. By nature blest

Were all these plains, these streams which flow so grand,

And all was known as only the wild West.

Here bloomed fair flowers, such still as bloom and grow

Where earth's neglected hills and landscapes be—

Here on these plains, and in these valleys low,
And prairies rolling like the waves of sea.

Here, all the day, did sing the prairie lark,

With none to hear the carol, note the strain,

Save roaming beast, and wolves that howl and bark,
And hostile Indian roaming o'er the plain.

But what to him was melody of song,

Or bloom of flower, or likeness of the ways

That hourly round the cultured homstead throng,
To bring contentment to man's weary days.

What grander scene could Nature's self enfold

In her sweet beauty, than these plains around,

These rivers fair, these hills and mountains bold,
By white man not yet traveled, not yet found.

In summer pretty in its garb of green,

In winter mournful in its shroud of snow,

Where white man's presence never yet had been,
And dauntless hunter even feared to go.

The Indian beating westward some new trail,

The wolf's increasing hunger, and the hiss

Of startled reptile fleeing from the vale—

Could artist paint a scene more weird than this?

A picture painted by no mortal hand

Of all things wild still further westward pressed,

Beheld by those who came first to this land,

Which once was known as only the wild West.

A LITTLE INCIDENT.

One day old Uncle Sam resolved to try

To rid Nebraska of the redskin pest;

He sent some troops (and winking his right eye)

Said, "Go and drive the redskins further west.

So fair a land as bright Nebraska be

Must not be held in check by savage men;

Her star is in our flag of liberty,

Go drive them west, in haste;" and quickly then

A troop was formed of brave Nebraska boys;

A friend of mine and others joined the band,

And given their guns and all that war implies,

They started forth to drive them from the land.

This friend of mine implored of me to go,

But I declined (had fought for Uncle Sam),

And seemed impelled to answer my friend "no,"

And stay in peace and safety where I am.

And they went forth, lieutenant brave at head,

Lieutenant sent from Washington to wipe

The earth with the redskins 'till they were dead,

Or deigned to kiss our flag, each star and stripe.

A distance out they halted—formed—began
The march into the wild lands of the west;
Arriving by the stream Republican
They halted—camped—retired to sleep and
rest.

The tale of Custer's fate and of his men
Could not be sadder, speaking of the end
Of these brave boys, for it was only when
They all were killed, including my dear friend,
The savage Sioux did further westward go.

A mother watched and waited, so did I,
She for her son, I for my friend, but lo!
As still the years so painfully go by

No spirit comes from out the West to tell
Where he was slain, or where his body lies,
Or by what ruthless means he bravely fell.
Tell us, O angels! watching in the skies,
Where our dear friend, so young and brave, doth
sleep,
That in our hope we may have fuller joy;
That in our grief we may not always weep—
Crocker his name, a noble Iowa boy.

MEN OF THE PIONEER DAYS.

The Pioneer! What can we say of him,
His hardships, dangers, courage, hopes and
fears?
The mem'ry of his deeds is growing dim,

O'ershadowed by the changes of the years.
Around us glows a more resplendent light,

Reflected from Progression's stern advance,
Before whose rays all new things take their flight,
With scarcely time to pause or backward glance.

Himself his own bold leader, far away

Beyond where ever white man's footsteps pressed,
He cast his lot, and daring there to stay,

His courage tamed the wildness of the West.
His courage gave to others better hope

The far-off journey to the West to try,
And to the view the prairie's boundless scope
Nearer it seemed to them to calmly lie.

A land as wild as any ocean tide

And boundless as its spreading waters seemed
When ships sailed only from its Eastern side,

And bold Columbus of its boundaries dreamed!
The same bright stars that made the sea seem sad

In e'en their most enchanting brilliancy
For all the world a heavenly gladness had
To bless as well the prairie as the sea.

Ah! there was sweetest grandeur in each vale,

Quiet as slumber on an infant's face,
With none to view it, none its charms to hail.

Except the tribes of an untutored race.
And there was room for earth's unnumbered poor
The East and old Pacific's coast between.

The Pioneer, he opened wide the door
And thousands to the plains came flocking in.
Since now all things are changed, and everywhere
Is marked the glorious betterment of man,
Oh! let us not forget the Pioneer,
But gladden him whenever most we can;
And speak and sing his praise 'till all the years
Allotted him and us shall cease to be;
Remember him in all our smiles and tears,
Who sought and found this land so fair and free.

WOMEN OF THE PIONEER DAYS.

In our praise of men, let us not forget
The women who came with them to this land;
Who shared the hardships by those brave men met,
Enduring all with willing heart and hand.
By nature they were not inclined to break
The ties that bind the heart to friends and home,
But for a husband's or a father's sake,
Far to the lonely West behold them come.
Behold them dwell in houses built of sod,
Adobes with often but one little room,
And in their love to man and prayer to God,
Were lost to half its darkness and its gloom.
A wish would come betimes and stay—and stay—
Tender and tearful, round the longing heart,
To see once more the old home, far away,
Within the East—that land of wealth and art.

But they endured the longing and the lot
Of sad uneasiness such longings bring,
And toiling on, awhile 'twas all forgot,
And happy as a prairie lark found cause to sing.
This great land here, this garden-spot of earth,
By cities, farms, and railways amply blest,
Owes to the pioneer its honored birth,
By his approach into the far, far West.

Look on the picture! Here where cities stand,
And railroads web the pretty prairies o'er,
And lovely farms abound on every hand,—
Here where was only wilderness before.
Ay, when is penned the book of western life,
Go place the name of woman in the part
That tells the most of hardships. Maid and wife,
Each shared the brunt with patient hand and heart.

They dwelt where life was every day the same,
A long and irksome uneventful round,
Where change of scene or custom never came,
And Fashion's brilliancy did not abound
To please the eye and to divert the view
From the fixed sameness which the prairies bear;
To feel exhaled at seeing something new,
Besides the green dress that the prairies wear.

They looked upon the pretty prairie flowers;
It made them think of roses in their bloom
Away within the pretty Eastern bowers,

Or near some dear one's ever silent tomb.
Ay, when is penned the book of western life,—
Dear author,—telling truly of the days
Of how the new states suffered in their strife,
Let thy best story be to woman's praise.

AN INDIAN FEAST.

There was haste of Indians, and I saw
Bucks, squaws, and young warriors passing near
Down to a barnyard filled with stacks of straw,
And cattle in one corner. It was here
Within this barnyard that a feast was on;
A fatted bovine did the Indians buy,
And almost ere the lovely morning's dawn
Upon the ground I saw the bovine lie

Slaughtered and dressed and ready for the feast.
There was present at this feast La-sha-ro,
The Pawnee chief, and hater of the East,
Which land he claimed was cause of all his woe.
The sun appeared, then halted it did seem,
As if to mark earth's desolation round,
And in the west, where, lovely as a dream,
Unnumbered miles of trackless plains abound.

A voice rang out—'twas signal to begin
The feast the Indians so much prized, adored;
A voice rang out—'twas signal to fall in—
In circle round the chief and festal board.
La-sha-ro raised his arm toward the West;

In his strong hand he held a carving knife;
He plunged the knife into the bovine's breast,
And then commenced the powwow and the strife—
The strife to get a chunk of that raw beef,
To be dealt out in many' forms and dribs
By one lone hand—that of the noted chief.
And there was fill of bone, and flesh, and ribs;
Those Indians ate, continued to all day,
Of the raw meat, until I thought they'd die.
They offered me a share—I rode away,
Exclaiming to myself "not much—good-bye."

LA-SHA-RO.

La-sha-ro was as brave a chief
As ever Indian knew,
But to the paths that led to war
He long since bade adieu;
He loved the white man's peaceful ways,
And loved the white man's land,
And fellowship could well be read
Within his dusky hand.

His tribe, the Pawnee, once could count
Full forty thousand braves,
But they are numbered with the dead
And sleeping in their graves,
Except the dismal few still spared
To waste away a life
The strangest and the saddest known
In all this earthly strife.

In sight of fields of waving corn,
And fruits of luscious taste;
In sound of labor's honest noise,
And labor's needful haste;
In reach of all ennobling things
Intended for man's good,
No charm has drawn the Indian near
The world's great brotherhood.

A sorrow weighs upon his heart,
Which once was full of hate;

He mourns the change the years have wrought,

And calls it cruel fate;

He speaks few words, but he has said:

“Our people are oppressed,
The white man took the East from us,
And now he takes the West.”

La-sha-ro's counsels were for peace;

He knew the fight was o'er;

He heard the knock of Progress' hand
Upon his wigwam door.

He told his people to be brave,

But not as once in war,—
Be brave and meet with cordial will
The pale-faced conqueror.

THE LAND THAT I LOVE.

I look on the scenes that abound in such beauty
Around where the landscapes sweep far to the
West,

And I feel in my heart 'tis a citizen's duty
To tell or to sing of the land he loves best.

I have traveled the Northland extensively over,
Have marched through the South where the pine
grandly towers,
And have dwelt in the East, by its pastures of
clover,—

All gems in the crown of this country of ours.

But over and far in that land comprehendless,
To ever be known as the land of the West,
Where all that is lovely is ample and endless,
Is the land dear to me—the land I love best.

'Tis the land where forever in beauty the river,
The prairie, the mountains, and hills I adore,
Receive from the hands of the bountiful giver
Of Nature's great gifts, all her rarest in store.

The land where a people born poor found compas-
sion,

And competence true in the days long ago,
Removed from the scenes of their childhood, where
fashion

And wealth brought their train darkly laden with
woe.

In the days long ago! Who has written the story
How the pioneer led the whole world to the plains,
And shame if at last not a mention of glory,
Nor a song, nor a word, to his mem'ry remains.
O where is the blessing our forefathers cherished,
And sought to bestow on America new?
And where are their lessons of love? Are they
perished?
And where, if still living, is fellowship true?
In the West I will answer. Oh! yes, where the
river,
The prairie, the mountains, and hills standing
near,
Live and smile on and on in their beauty forever,
Is fellowship found, blessing all with its cheer.

IOWA.

I do not wonder that Iowa has taken the position it has in the counsels of the nation, that it has assumed the leadership which it has done, when I see not merely your soil, your farms, your products; but those best of all products—the men and women.—THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

IOWA.

Hast ever watched how bright the stars
Appear within the western skies,
Those lovely, ever changeless stars,
So near to where the prairie lies;

And how all seemed so grand, and near
To where the weary mortal trods;
And how the picture seemed so dear
To heart and eye—that work of God's.

In charming semblance see as fair
A scene upon our vision fall;
Behold the stars of statehood there,
With that of Iowa bright as all—

There—on our country's flag, dear flag,
Surviving through so many wars—
From whose bright folds no foe could drag
To dust its ever shining stars.

Here where such glorious splendor lies,
Strange, yet enchanting to the view;
Where farms abound, and cities rise,
And men a life of thrift pursue.

Who bravely pressed their weary way
Westward in search of this fair soil,
Soon none will celebrate that day
In annual gathering. By the toil

And hardships that man undertakes
 Within the West, great blessings come,
And presently surprised awakes
 The vale to greet some new-made home.
Within thy homes, oh! Iowa,
 May common friendship long abide.
By folly often spurned away,
 Too oft by envious folk denied.

NIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Where the western mountains rear
To a dizzy height,
Still and solemn, dark and drear,
Is the hush of night.

Sweet-voiced rivers murmur low
As through dusky vales they flow,
Being like some one at rest
With no sorrow on his breast.

Night when beautiful and calm
Doth great charms possess,
Falling like a soothing balm
On the wilderness.

In the soft mesmeric spell
Bird and beast to sleep have fell,
And the savage Indian yields
Hunting grounds for dreamland fields.

Passion, like the heated day,
By the breath of night,
Cools and quickly breaks away—
Vanished in its flight.

Savage beast in cozy lair,—
Panther fierce, or mountain bear,—
Or the slimy snakes that creep,
Craving only rest and sleep.
Echoing in the mountain pass
Indian yells abound,

And the hunter brave, alas!

Trembles at the sound.

In his dream all this he hears,

And awaking in his fears,

Finds the earth enwrapped in sleep,

O'er which stars their vigil keep.

In the spell of nightly awe,

By bright stars caressed,

On his bed of leaves and straw

Doth the miner rest;

Sad is sleep when in its arms

Dreamers long for other charms,

Reaching forth to fasten hold

On a void—instead of gold.

Perched aloft, nor seen, nor heard,

O'er earth high above,

Sleeps the weary eagle bird,

Gentle as the dove.

It would seem no heart could crave

Terror to a bird so brave,

Howe'er wild the sport might seem,

Howe'er wild the eagle's scream.

But what cares the hunter bold

Long within the West;

He will not the charge withhold

Pointed at its breast;

And when from its perch on high

It drops down to earth to die,
Strange its death should not awake
Pity for our country's sake.

Valleys fair sweep far and wide,
With a silence grand,
O'er which look the hills in pride,—
All a wildsome land.

In his dreams of friends and home,
Lonely doth the hermit roam,
Through these vales, and o'er these hills,
By the mountain streams and rills.

Night to him is all too brief,
For he loves its shade;
It accords best with his grief
Disappointment made.

Strange and weak as it may seem,
In the mountains sleep and dream,
'Neath the pale moon high above,
Men demented—all for love!

MY MOTHER'S GRAVE.

IN A CEMETERY IN NEBRASKA.

Mother! this is thy grave, they say,
I know not—on thy burial day
Thy child was in a distant land
And could not clasp, dear one, thy hand.
I well remember when I left
How sad, how sorry, and bereft
Of joy and cheerfulness thou seemed.
Upon my heart there never fell
Before so sad the word farewell
As when thou said: “My child, good-bye,”
And then began to grieve—and cry,
With tears that fairly streamed.
To say that this is not thy tomb,
This mound of beauty, yet of gloom,
Would all the tears and grief belie
Of those who by it weep and sigh.
Mother! this is thy grave, for now
A household doth beside it bow,
And I, with them, grieve bitterly,
Because no more thy face I see.
The funeral bell was slowly tolled,
Kind friends assembled to behold
Thy gentle hands placed on thy breast,
Thy form enshrouded for its rest,
Thine eyes prepared for lasting sleep,

No more to grieve—no more to weep.
And I was absent, and will miss
Thy words of parting and thy kiss!
Mother! thy life was like the flowers,
So tender through the trying hours
Of human struggle, human care,
And all of patience though didst bear.
Alone the gracious God on high
Can read a mother's joy, or sigh;
Alone the gracious God Above
Can know a mother's faithful love!
It does not seem that thou art dead,
But "this is death," an angel said,
That came down through the morning light,
To watch thy spirit take its flight.
If never more I pass near by
This graveyard, where I weep and sigh;
If never more within its gloom
I walk to visit thy dear tomb,
Where'er I wander, or may dwell,
The story of thy love I'll tell,
Farewell! Dear mother! O farewell!

MISCELLANEOUS.

To give variety, the following miscellaneous selections
are added.

AN EVENING MEDITATION.

I know the world is full of cheer,
And joys surround us year by year;
I know the hours that hasten by
Not all on wings of sorrow fly;
I know hearts may be gay and light,
But mine is very sad to-night.

I fancy on that storied shore,
(‘Where none return who go before’),
I see the forms of those I knew
Upon this earth—friends kind and true.
I miss their smiles—their voices glad—
Their presence here—and I am sad.

In every heart however gay,
However sweet life speeds away;
In every heart however glad,
Some sorrow comes to make it sad,—
To rob it of its peace and light,
As mine is thus made sad to-night.

A TRIBUTE TO COURAGE.

He looked upon the deep blue sea,
 Outstretched beneath a sunny sky,
And saw how swift and billowy
 Tide after tide rolled grandly by,
And wave and distance in their might
Seemed more to fire his wild delight.

He knew how frail was man beside
 The ocean in its calmest sleep,
But he with seaman's hope and pride,
 Feared not the horrors of the deep.
Tide, darkness, and the sea's unrest,
Were scenes he seemed to love the best.

None yet who left their native shore,
 With spirit glad, and prospect fond,
Had ever sailed the wide seas o'er,
 In quest of fairer lands beyond.
Faith, courage, and ambition fled!
They saw no light of hope ahead.

"I'll go—and may not see again
 The beauties of my native shore;
Farewell to home, and friends, and Spain,—
 I'll sail the boundless waters o'er."
And every solemn word awoke
A sense of sadness as he spoke.

All ready for the voyage, through
The mists of ocean forth he sailed,
While round him constant dangers grew,
And fiercer storms his ships assailed;
And for long days no sign around
Foretold the dismal ocean's bound.

The warrior leads his men with pride
To victory—all strong and brave,
And yet the charge is faint beside
The strife of courage with the wave.
The baffled hosts may shun defeat,
But sinking ships cannot retreat.

All hail the day Columbus came
And set his foot upon this shore!
Long live the noble seaman's name,
Who sailed the deep blue waters o'er,—
Who sought and found this fair land here,
The world's great Western Hemisphere!

LIFE.

Life, like our labor, bears its trace
Of noble worth, or dark disgrace;
We leave behind in what we do,—
By effort pictured to our view,—
Our tasks complete, or illy done,
For life is not the same nor one—

It has its strange misleading roads,
With pilgrims bearing heavy loads.
If in the pathway of the just
Is placed our footsteps, faith, and trust,
Then Hope will come ere far we've gone,
And glad will be the journey on!

Life's burdens are what sages call
The cares and sorrows that befall
The human soul, more keen to some
Bereft of comfort and of home;
Bereft of every social bliss,
Of friendship's love, and friendship's kiss.

If eyes that meet yours prove most true,
That truth will always gladden you;
If words you hear are soft and kind,
Those words will bless your troubled mind,
And deep in memory's holy place
Will each be kept with lasting grace.

It lies within each willing heart
To bear in life some noble part;
To gladden others by some deed
Of precious kindness, for we need,
Who find but little mercy here,
A friend's remembrance and his cheer.



FEB 5 1904

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 021 929 725 7